



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING



KEITH CREAGH
DIRECTOR

SUBMITTED: June 15, 2015
RESUBMITTED: July 13, 2015
RESUBMITTED: August 3, 2015

A P P R O V E D
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MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
(ASSISTANT TO THE COMMISSION)

MEMORANDUM TO THE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Subject: Waterfowl and Other Migratory Bird Hunting Regulations for 2015 - 2016
Wildlife Conservation Order Amendment No. 8 of 2015

Authority:

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, authorizes the Director and the Commission to issue orders to manage wild animals in this state.

Discussion and Background:

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) annually prescribes migratory bird hunting season frameworks, or outer limits, for dates and times when hunting may occur, and the maximum number of birds that may be taken and possessed. Federal frameworks are negotiated with states via the Flyway Councils, with this process being partitioned into early and late season selections. Late seasons generally open following the Saturday closest to September 24. Late season selections are submitted to the USFWS by August 30 each year. In Michigan, late seasons currently include the regular Canada goose season, duck seasons, the late Canada goose season, and seasons on mergansers, and coots. The falconry season is also among the late seasons.

The Department's submission for the late waterfowl regulations will be finalized in early August after Federal frameworks are established. The Department's recommendations and options will be based on State and Federal assessments of waterfowl population status, habitat conditions, and public input, including discussion with the Citizen Waterfowl Advisory Committee (CWAC), at their August 1, 2015, meeting.

For the original order and amendment, the Department had included appropriate sections from the Wildlife Conservation Order, as amended during 2014, to identify those sections likely requiring amendment in 2015. Final dates were provided as soon as they become available on August 3, 2015.

In 2016, the process will transition from partitioned early and late season selections to a single selection process. Frameworks will be established using the previous year's data of waterfowl populations and habitat conditions instead of current year conditions. This will promote positive benefits such as a more simplified and efficient process. Waterfowl hunters will also know

waterfowl season dates early in the year instead of right before seasons open which will allow the hunters to plan better for hunting trips. Over the coming months, the Department will be developing a communication strategy to make hunters aware of this change and how the new process will work beginning in January 2016.

Biological

Since 1991, Michigan has cooperated with other states, the USFWS, and Canadian agencies in conducting aerial surveys of breeding ducks and geese. Spring mallard population estimates from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin are included in estimates of mid-continent mallard abundance and additionally are needed for establishing annual waterfowl hunting season frameworks for the Mississippi, Central, and Pacific Flyways. The spring 2015 breeding waterfowl survey was conducted in late April and the 2015 estimate of total ducks is up slightly from last year at 431,095. The 2015 estimate for mallards is 237,750, which is similar to 2014. The 2015 statewide wetland abundance estimate is 522,500 ponds which was also similar to the 2014 estimate. The 2015 estimate for Canada geese is up from last year at 308,163.

Flyway Councils are advised by flyway technical committees consisting of State and Provincial biologists. These technical committees evaluate species and population status, harvest, and hunter-participation data during the development of the Council recommendations. The USFWS then evaluates the Flyway Councils recommendations, considering species status and biology, cumulative effects of regulations, and existing regulatory policy. Likewise, the Department's Waterfowl Workgroup and the CWAC review information on species status and habitat conditions when developing recommendations for waterfowl hunting seasons.

Social

The Department will develop recommendations based on Waterfowl Workgroup discussions with the CWAC. The CWAC met on August 1 to make recommendations for the late waterfowl seasons.

The Department's Waterfowl Workgroup has established goals for duck hunting seasons that include maintaining Michigan's waterfowl hunting heritage by increasing hunter recruitment and retention, balancing regulations simplicity with maximum hunting opportunity, and ensuring that seasons encompass maximum duck numbers and abundant species.

Biannually, the Department mails Waterfowl Harvest Surveys to a sample of waterfowl hunters to estimate hunting activity and determine opinions and satisfaction with hunting regulations.

Economic

In 2012, waterfowl hunters took about 371,000 waterfowl hunting trips and spent an average of \$463 per hunter annually on waterfowl hunting trips. Collectively, waterfowl hunters spent an estimated \$22.7 million on hunting trips primarily to hunt waterfowl in Michigan (2012 Waterfowl Harvest Report). Businesses located in communities near well-known waterfowl hunting areas receive economic benefits from these waterfowl hunting trips.

Geese:

The Department is recommending regular goose season dates based on goose population goals, feedback from the CWAC, and surveys of waterfowl hunters. Waterfowl hunters have expressed their desire for additional opportunities to hunt ducks and geese on the same days. The season dates that are recommended provide for overlap of the goose and duck seasons.

The recommended dates for the 2015-16 regular Canada goose season are:

- North Goose Zone – September 11 to December 11
- Middle Goose Zone – September 19 to December 19
- South Goose Zone – September 19 to September 27, October 10 to December 6, and December 26 to December 27

The goose limit during the regular season will be consistent with established USFWS frameworks for the Mississippi Flyway. The daily bag limit for the regular goose season will be two. The possession limit is three times the daily limit for geese.

The four Goose Management Units (GMUs) in the state have season dates that differ from the remainder of the state. The bag limit for all GMUs will be two, and the season recommendations are as follows:

- Saginaw County – September 19 to September 27, October 10 to December 6, and December 26 to January 19, 2016
- Tuscola/Huron – September 19 to September 27, October 10 to December 6, and December 26 to January 19, 2016
- Allegan County – October 31 to January 30, 2016
- Muskegon County Wastewater – October 17 to November 14 and December 1 to December 22

The recommended dates for the 2015-16 special late Canada goose season are January 23 to February 14, 2016. The recommended daily bag limit is five. The recommended dates for the season for white, blue, and Ross' geese, white-fronted geese, and brant are similar to the regular and late Canada goose seasons in each respective zone and GMU with a bag limit of 20 for white, blue, and Ross' geese and 1 for white-fronted and brant. We have strived to overlap these other goose seasons with Canada goose seasons as much as federal frameworks allow.

Ducks:

The USFWS offered a 60-day season and six-duck daily limit based on an adaptive harvest management strategy using prairie pond numbers and mid-continent mallard abundance as a guide to season length and daily duck limit. The Wildlife Division developed the following duck season dates for 2015 based on feedback from the CWAC, analysis of data on hunter opinions, migration timing, and hunter success.

The recommended dates for the 2015 duck season are:

- North Zone – September 26 to November 22 and November 28 to 29
- Middle Zone – October 3 to November 29 and December 12 to December 13
- South Zone – October 10 to December 6 and December 26 to December 27

Geese:

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Ducks:

The USFWS offered a 60-day season and six-duck daily limit based on an adaptive harvest management strategy using prairie pond numbers and mid-continent mallard abundance as a guide to season length and daily duck limit. The Wildlife Division developed the following duck season dates for 2015 based on feedback from the CWAC, analysis of data on hunter opinions, migration timing, and hunter success.

The recommended dates for the 2015 duck season are:

- North Zone – September 26 to November 22 and November 28 to 29
- Middle Zone – October 3 to November 29 and December 12 to December 13
- South Zone – October 10 to December 6 and December 26 to December 27

The daily bag limit for ducks will be six ducks with the following species-specific restrictions: four mallards (no more than two of which may be female), one black duck, two northern pintail, three wood ducks, two redhead ducks, three scaup, and two canvasbacks. In addition to the duck limit, hunters may take five mergansers, only two of which may be a hooded merganser. The possession limit is three times the daily limit for ducks, coots, and mergansers.

For the falconry season, the recommended dates for the additional days outside the gun hunting seasons for ducks, mergansers, coots, and moorhens are December 28 to January 21, 2016 and March 1 to 10, 2016.

Recommendation:

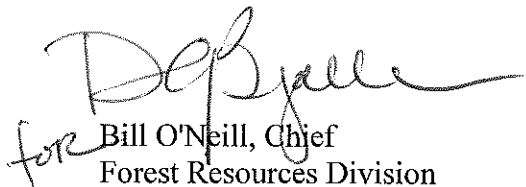
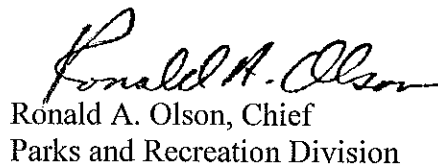
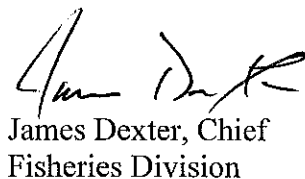
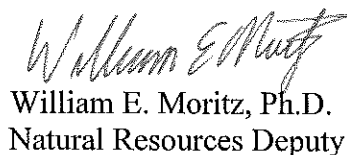
This order was submitted for information on July 9, 2015, at the Natural Resources Commission Meeting. This item appeared on the Department's June 2015 calendar and may be eligible for approval on August 13, 2015.



Russ Mason, Ph.D., Chief
Wildlife Division



Gary Hagler, Chief
Law Enforcement Division


for Bill O'Neill, Chief
Forest Resources Division
Ronald A. Olson, Chief
Parks and Recreation Division
James Dexter, Chief
Fisheries Division
William E. Moritz, Ph.D.
Natural Resources Deputy

I have analyzed and discussed these recommendations with staff and concur as to matters over which the Director has authority.

Keith Creagh, Director

Date

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ORDER

Amendment No. 8 of 2015

By authority conferred on the Natural Resources Commission and the Director of the Department of Natural Resources by sections 40107 and 40113a of 1994 PA 451, MCL 324.40107 and 324.40113a, it is ordered that effective August 14, 2015, the following section(s) of the Wildlife Conservation Order shall read as follows:

3.415 Migratory birds open seasons, possession limit defined, exceptions

Sec. 3.415. The migratory bird possession limit shall be three times the daily limit. The migratory bird hunting open seasons and exceptions are as shown in table 10:

TABLE 10
Migratory Bird Open Seasons

Season and Species	Zone or Management Unit	Open Season
Ducks (regular season)	North Zone	September 26 to November 22 and November 28 to November 29
	Middle Zone	October 3 to November 29 and December 12 to December 13
	South Zone	October 10 to December 6 and December 26 to December 27
Merganser		Same dates as ducks in the respective zones
Coots		Same dates as ducks in the respective zones
Common Moorhens (Gallinules)	Statewide	September 1 to November 9
Canada Goose (regular season)	North Zone	September 11 to December 11
	Middle Zone	September 19 to December 19
	South Zone, excluding GMUs listed below in the table	September 19 to September 27, October 10 to December 6, and December 26 to December 27
	Tuscola/Huron GMU	September 19 to September 27, October 10 to December 6, and December 26 to January 19, 2016
	Saginaw County GMU	September 19 to September 27, October 10 to December 6, and December 26 to January 19, 2016
	Allegan County GMU	October 31 to January 30, 2016
	Muskegon W.W. GMU	October 17 to November 14 and December 1 to December 22
Canada Goose (special late season)	Southern Michigan Goose Management Unit as defined in section 12.700 of this order	January 23 to February 14, 2016
Snow and Ross' Geese	North Zone	September 11 to December 11
	Middle Zone	September 19 to December 19

White-fronted Geese and Brant	South Zone, excluding GMUs listed below in the table	October 10 to December 6, December 26 to December 27, and January 23 to February 14, 2016
	Tuscola/Huron GMU	September 19 to September 27, October 10 to December 6, and December 26 to January 19, 2016
	Saginaw County GMU	September 19 to September 27, October 10 to December 6, and December 26 to January 19, 2016
	Allegan County GMU	October 31 to January 30, 2016
	Muskegon W.W. GMU	October 17 to November 14 and December 1 to December 22
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3.416 Migratory game birds; daily limit.

Sec. 3.416. The daily limit of migratory game birds for the seasons specified in section 3.415 shall be as follows:

(1) **Ducks, daily limit.** The daily limit shall be 6 ducks of which no more than 4 may be mallards, no more than 2 may be a hen mallard, no more than 1 may be a black duck, no more than 3 may be wood ducks, no more than 2 may be pintails, no more than 2 may be redheads, no more than 3 may be scaup, and no more than 2 may be canvasbacks.

(2) **Merganser, daily limit.** The merganser daily limit shall be 5 mergansers of which no more than 2 may be a hooded merganser.

(3) **Canada goose, north, middle, and south zones, including GMUs, daily limit.** In the north, middle, and south zones as described in sections 1.7, 1.8, and 1.9, respectively, and all GMUs as described in sections 12.701, 12.702, 12.703, and 12.705 the daily limit shall be 2 Canada geese.

(4) **Canada goose, daily limit, exceptions.**

(a) The Canada goose daily limit during the early September season shall be 5.

(b) The Canada goose daily limit during the special late season shall be 5.

(5) **Other geese, daily limit.** The daily limit on light geese (snow, blue, and Ross) shall be 20. The daily limit on Brant and white-fronted geese shall be 1.

(6) **Coot, daily limit.** The daily limit of coot shall be 15.

(7) **Common moorhen (gallinule), daily limit.** The daily limit of moorhen shall be 1.

3.422 Migratory birds, falconry, open seasons; daily limit, possession limit.

Sec. 3.422. (1) The open season for taking common snipe (jacksnipe), woodcock, and Virginia and Sora rails by falconry shall be the same dates as the firearm seasons in the respective zones for these species as described in sections 3.415 and 3.420.

(2) The open season for taking geese shall be the same dates as the firearm seasons in the respective zones and goose management units.

(3) The open season for taking duck, merganser, coot and common moorhen (gallinule) shall be the same dates as the firearm seasons in the respective zones for these species, plus the season shall be open statewide December 28 to January 21, 2016 and March 1 through March 10, 2016.

(4) The daily limit for migratory game birds taken by falconry shall be 3 birds combined, and the possession limit shall be 9 birds combined.

Issued on this 13th day of August, 2015.

Approved as to matters over which the Natural Resources Commission has authority.

John Matonich, Chairman
Natural Resources Commission

Approved as to matters over which the Director has authority.

Keith Creagh
Director